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Cast of Characters

The March sisters:

JO

MEG

AMY

BETH

The older members of the family:

HANNAH

MARMEE

AUNT MARCH

FATHER

The neighbors:

OLD MR. LAURENCE

LAURIE

BROOKE, Laurie's tutor

Setting

The March family house and yard, 1863. An old purple martin house which serves as a post office box, stands upstage of the house.

ACT I

Prelude

Scene 1	Making Christmas
Scene 2	Marmee's Homecoming
Scene 3	Melodrama
Scene 4	Christmas Party
Scene 5	Jo's Garret
Scene 6	Vanity Fair
Scene 7	Theater Outing
Scene 8	Amy's Revenge

ACT II

Scene 1	Consequences
Scene 2	Temper
Scene 3	Gratitude
Scene 4	Telegram
Scene 5	Secrets
Scene 6	Laurie Makes Mischief
Scene 7	Valley of Shadow
Scene 8	Aunt March Settles the Question
Scene 9	Heartache
Scene 10	Homecoming

LITTLE WOMEN

by Marisha Chamberlain

a stage adaptation of the novel by Louisa May Alcott

ACT I

Prelude

(Lights up on JO in attic.)

JO. *(Writes:)* In the beginning, you're just a young thing, just another young creature of the universe and you hardly know you're a girl, you're so busy learning to walk and run, and ride if there's a horse handy...or if not, the limb of an apple tree; rejoicing in what you've got and looking forward to what you will have, whether more or less. More, you hope. You can't help it.

Scene 1: Making Christmas

(Snow begins to fall on the old house. JO descends from the garret, throws herself on the parlor rug.)

JO. Christmas won't be Christmas without any presents—

MEG. —It's so dreadful to be poor—

AMY. —I don't think it's fair for some girls to have plenty of pretty things, and other girls nothing at all—

BETH. We've got Father and Mother and each other.

MEG. We haven't got Father and won't have him for a long, long time.

JO. Well, there's a war on, and I think it splendid of Father to go as chaplain as he's too old to be drafted and not strong enough to soldier. *(Picks up her knitting and sets to it furiously)* I wish I was standing guard outside Father's tent this very minute. But I'm not. So be it. You don't have Father, but you have me. Father said I was to take his place, and so I will, and what we're going to do, girls, is to make our own kind of Christmas.

AMY. I suppose we have to humor her.

JO. What? Humor me?

AMY. You aren't Father.

JO. No, but I'm to take his place. He said.

AMY. Being Father in this family has always been your fondest wish.

JO. No it's not, it's a duty. A homemade Christmas, I say. A Christmas of our own invention.

AMY. You wish you were Father because you want to be a boy—

JO. So what if I do?

AMY. —and because you want any excuse to boss us.

JO. Oh, fiddlesticks, you call it bossing but I know you'll want to do what I have in mind. The play we've been rehearsing, girls, why don't we present it for Mother?

BETH. Yes!

MEG. I don't know.

JO. It's almost ready. If you know your lines, Amy, I'd say we're ready.

AMY. Well, I do know my lines.

(JO casts knitting aside, goes to fetch box, slippers, and wrappings.)

JO. All right, we'll have the play...and that's not all.

AMY. I suppose we could act the play...but last Christmas we had plum pudding and cranberries and oysters and presents all around. This year we have corn pudding with raisins. *Raisins*, mind you.

MEG. Hush, Amy.

AMY. That's well enough for you to say, Meg. You and Jo will be going out to parties, as you did last year—

JO. I won't be!

MEG. Nor I.

BETH. Why not?

MEG. Because I have nothing fit to wear. My white muslin is worn out and Jo spilled tea on my tarlatan.

(JO settles down to wrap box, with her back to the others.)

JO. *(Mutters:)* Jo spilled tea. Jo spilled tea. Can't help being clumsy—always in a hurry.

BETH. What are you up to, Jo?

JO. Shh! Get the dress out, Meg, and I'll spill tea over the rest of it and you can go to parties in a tea-colored gown.

(AMY tries to sneak a look at what JO's wrapping.)

MEG. It's not just the tea stain, it's the torn hem. Torn and mended in three places, and a seam giving out at the back—

JO. Don't peek, Amy.

MEG. —not to mention the patched cuffs.

JO. Well, pretend you're a poor foreigner who's just blown in from a storm, or a gypsy, or a spy under orders to attend parties! That's the only way I'd ever go—under orders.

AMY. And what is so wrong with parties?

MEG. Amy, don't get her started.

JO. People ask you to dance, is what.

AMY. Boys...

(AMY sneaks a clothespin out and puts it on her nose.)

JO. Yes, unless you happen to be a boy yourself, which solves the whole thing. Because then you can stand with your back to the wall and frown down on everything.

MEG. Which is what you do, anyway.

JO. Do not.

BETH. You do, don't you, Jo?

JO. Well, but any minute some person can step up and ask to dance with you. And you're hurt if they don't and disgusted if they do.

And then you're out there on the floor and they're tromping all over the hem of your dress. Amy, what's that on your nose?

AMY. You know what it is.

BETH. Don't you mean you're tromping all over their feet?

JO. All right, yes. I'm not the greatest dancer. It's a clothespin. If you're going to pin it up there in the breeze, you might as well wash a handkerchief and hang it.

MEG. Well, if you can't dance at a party, Jo, at least you could flirt.

JO. Flirt! Meg, you don't mean that. Because if you're going to flirt, I'll have to go to all the parties and stop you. Dance with a person and people start thinking things and saying things. Flirt and those things might as well be true. Because, before you know it, bad goes to worse, and some young man comes calling.

AMY. Yes? And then?

BETH. *(To AMY, indicating clothespin:)* Doesn't that hurt?

AMY. Maybe a little.

MEG. Amy, dear, I don't really think that will really alter the shape of your nose.

AMY. But I want it to be extinguished, not flat and stumpy.

BETH. Extinguished?

AMY. "The female face should be in every feature, delicate and extinguished."

MEG. *(Chokes down a laugh, casts a warning eye on JO:)* You mean distinguished, Amy.

AMY. Distinguished. *(Sighs and takes off the clothespin. To JO:)* And then some young man comes calling, and?

JO. Comes calling to try and marry you. The very worst thing. There, I've spoken it.

MEG. *(To herself:)* I don't see why it's the very worst thing.

JO. Because then you have to mind your cooking and your sewing, and be sweet and pretty—in every feature *extinguished*—and your adventures are over and your liberty is finished, and you might as well be dead.

MEG. Shh, I know, I know. Sorry, Jo.

AMY. Marmee married Papa.

JO. That's different. They are our Mother and Father.

MEG. Amy, you know she can't really discuss this. Don't worry, Jo. If I have to look ragged at a party, I'd really rather stay at home.

(BETH tries to peek at what JO is wrapping.)

JO. Shoo, Beth. I'll let you see in a minute.

AMY. I wish I could stay at home when I have nothing nice to wear. But I must go out anyway, every day to school.

MEG. School is not a party. And yes, you must.

JO. But we're meant to go out and see the world, Amy. I only mean it's good to be home at Christmas. The world's full of places and fascinating people. What's the point in sitting home every day?

BETH. Nobody sits at home but me.

JO. Oh, I didn't mean you, Bethy.

MEG. Do you think you'd like to try school again, dear?

BETH. I might... No, I simply can't bear so many faces—

JO. You're not lazy, you're bashful, Beth—and you don't merely sit at home, you work very hard, as hard as Meg or I do. You play the piano, which is truly beyond me. You play wonderfully well and it takes you to other places, doesn't it? *(BETH nods.)* You and I go to all the really good places, to the halls of legend in the days of yore, to Beowulf in the Mead Hall and—

BETH. —the bloodthirsty Grendel.

AMY. Eww!

JO. Yes, or to fairy lands. I'm writing you another story. And when this one's done I'll have a whole book. And the story begins...

BETH. Long ago, far away, in a distant land...

JO. That's right, and one of these days, Bethy, I intend to take you out on an actual adventure, not in a book or in music—but a real, pack up and go journey, far, far away.

BETH. Do you really mean it, Jo?

JO. Yes, I do. I'll take all of you. (*Presents box.*) Now, how's this?

BETH. A Christmas present!

AMY. Who's it for?

MEG. There weren't to be any presents.

AMY. It's for me, isn't it?

MEG. Amy!

AMY. Well, I'm the youngest.

BETH. Where did you get it, Jo?

JO. I bought it.

AMY. With what money?

JO. The only money I had—

BETH. Your Christmas dollar!

AMY. Your Christmas dollar! You were supposed to spend that on yourself.

JO. I did. I spent it to please myself.

AMY. Then it's not for me.

MEG. I don't believe it's for any of us...

BETH. No one in this room, because she'd give it to the person privately and not make the rest jealous.

AMY. It's not for Aunt March.

JO. Horrors, no!

MEG. I've guessed who it's for.

BETH. So have I.

MEG. It's not for that new boy, is it? Old Mr. Laurence's grandson? I know you like to watch him ride his horse.

JO. I would like to meet him, but I'd hardly give a present to a boy I haven't met.

BETH. You're guessing too far afield.

MEG. It's for Mother!

JO. Yes! It's for Marmee! I thought that would make me happiest. We know Christmas isn't only plum pudding and we ought to show Marmee that we know it. So, let's get cracking. There's our Christmas play to rehearse, and carols to sing, and there's one present for Marmee—

MEG. Two. I bought her a pair of gloves.

(MEG fetches gloves.)

JO. You did? Why, there's a good fellow!

BETH. And I bought her handkerchiefs!

(BETH brings out handkerchiefs.)

JO. Bravo, Beth!

AMY. And I—well, I—well—I kept my dollar.

MEG. It's all right, Amy. You can keep it. It's yours to keep.

AMY. It's just I haven't decided how to spend it yet. I thought perhaps a box of Faber's drawing pencils. You may think me selfish, but if I'm ever to be an artist, I must have pencils. If I'm too young for parties, at least I can have drawing pencils. You have no idea how boring it is to be made to stay at home when others are going to parties. It really is expruchiating—exstrupiating—

BETH. Excruciating.

JO. Thank you, Beth.

MEG. It's yours to keep or spend.

JO. Mmm, what a glorious smell from the kitchen! Must be pudding! *(Calls:)* Hannah, how's the pudding !?!

AMY. Don't shout, Jo.

JO. Oh, I am hungry! Rehearsal! Rehearsal, everybody! *(Sings trumpet fanfare)* "The Witches' Curse, An Operatic Tragedy." Or rather, that is to say, "A Christmas Opera"!

MEG. What has Christmas to do with it?

JO. I'll have to work that in.

(HANNAH enters, wiping her hands on her apron.)

AMY. Hannah, what *are* you cooking?

HANNAH. You saw everything that went into it, dear.

AMY. It couldn't just be corn pudding—it smells too delicious.

HANNAH. It's what we have, thanks be to God.

(AMY takes a few steps toward the kitchen.)

JO. Hannah, could you come watch our rehearsal? The fainting scene isn't right. When Amy faints, it's supposed to be shocking. A great lady has fainted and all that. So. A bell sounds. The curtains fly apart. Act II—a gloomy castle—here. The forbidding tower—there. The beautiful Zara stands in the tower. Scene two. Zara? Beautiful Zara? Amy?

AMY. Yes?

JO. You stand here, Amy. Remember, by now you've already descended the tower—

HANNAH. I'd love to help, girls, but I have to watch the pudding—it's all we have so I want it to be perfect.

AMY. How soon may we eat it, Hannah?

HANNAH. Heavens! Not 'til evening. Now, you stay out of the kitchen, Amy.

(HANNAH exits.)

JO. Don't worry, Hannah. She's needed here. Put your mind to fainting, Amy.

(Crosses to the piano, bangs on the lowest keys. As "Hugo," turns to AMY.)

Oh, Zara! Beautiful Zara! *(Pulls imaginary pistol)* I give you one final chance, or you die!

AMY. I love you, Roderigo.

JO. I'm not Roderigo, I'm Hugo.

AMY. Are you the hero or the villain?

JO. Well, which do you think?! I'm pointing a pistol at you. Amy, we have to perform this tonight! Aren't you at all acquainted with the story?

AMY. Don't worry. I know my lines.

JO. Well, speak them, then!

AMY. All right, let me get set. *(Sets a chair out to faint on)* Here I go. *(Delivers her line:)* "I'm fainting!"

(AMY faints into the chair.)

JO. You can't faint into a chair—you have to just drop, or it's not fainting. Look here—do it this way: clasp your hands so— *(Staggers across the room)* This is your line, Amy: Roderigo! Save me! Save me!

(JO sings out a shriek and falls to the floor.)

AMY. *(Squeaks:)* Roderigo! Roderigo!

(AMY faints.)

MEG. She sounds as though someone is sticking her with pins.

JO. Amy, are you seriously trying?

AMY. Yes, I'm trying—and you're not so brilliant. You don't look like Hugo the villain.

JO. Well, wait 'til I put on the big red boots. *(As Hugo:)* And I think— *(Draws imaginary sword)* —the glint of my sword will impress you—

AMY. And you sound like you've got a frog in your neck, and I don't want to rehearse any more.

MEG. A frog in her throat, Amy.

AMY. I don't want to rehearse any more. We've rehearsed this play every day for a month and it's become tiresome.

JO. Is that so!

AMY. Yes, that's so. I'm nearly bored to tears with this stupid old play. Even if you did write it!

MEG. Amy, a play can't be any good unless it's properly rehearsed.

JO. It's too late. When the audience laughs at you, Amy, just don't blame me.

AMY. Marmee and Hannah won't laugh. They'll say I'm pretty!

JO. *(Groans, drops to her knees)* They will, too, and you'll be satisfied! I see right through you, Amy. You're transparent as glass.

AMY. You do not. You don't know my thoughts.

JO. Oh, don't I? "Marmee and Hannah will tell me I'm pretty!" And that's all you want out of life. Christopher Columbus!

AMY. Is not. And don't swear.

JO. I'll swear if I like, and what's more— *(Sits up, puts her hands in her pockets, whistles.)*

AMY. Don't, Jo—it's so boyish!

JO. That's why I do it. You know where I belong?—with Father at the war. I'd disguise myself in a uniform and go to battle like any soldier.

AMY. Well, go if you must. You have the boots.

BETH. Don't tempt her, Amy.

JO. Yes, and wouldn't I fight fiercely? Fight and die, if I had to.

BETH. Don't say that, Jo!

JO. It's just talk, Bethy. But I won't be an old poke forever.

AMY. An old poke?

JO. A fellow with nothing to do but knit.

AMY. You aren't a "fellow."

JO. Am if I say so.

AMY. I detest rude, unladylike girls!

JO. And I hate niminy-piminy chits!

(AMY puts her cloak on.)

MEG. Now, Jo and Amy!

JO. Where are you going?

AMY. I have an errand.

JO. You can't go now. The pudding's almost done. We can't have you gone when the celebration's starting.

MEG. Really, girls, you're both to blame, and much as I hate to lecture—

AMY. How am I to blame?

MEG. Well, sometimes you are *entirely* too prissy for your own good. You'll grow up to be a goose if you don't take care. Your manners are nice when you don't try to be elegant—

AMY. Are they?

MEG. Yes, they are.

AMY. And how is Jo to blame?

MEG. Do you have an errand?

AMY. Yes.

MEG. Then you'd best be on your way.

AMY. Very well, I'm going.

JO. Come back, directly. It won't be a long lecture—I know exactly what Meg will say.

(AMY exits.)

MEG. Now, then, Jo.

JO. Go ahead. I'm ready for you this time.

BETH. You don't have to tell her. She knows.

MEG. But, I must. It's time you left off boyish tricks. Aren't you old enough, Josephine?

JO. Josephine!

BETH. You'd best not call her Josephine. Aunt March calls her Josephine. I don't think she'll ever answer to Josephine.

MEG. Thank you, Beth. Now that you're tall, *Jo*, now that you're tall and turn up your hair, you must remember that you are a lady.

JO. I'm not! And if turning up my hair makes me one—there! (*Pulls off her hairnet, shakes out hair.*)

MEG. Honestly, Jo.

JO. In the beginning, you're just a young thing, just another young creature of the universe and you hardly know you're a girl you're so busy learning to walk and run, and ride if there's a horse handy—

BETH. Or the limb of a tree, if there's no horse!

JO. That's right, Bethy.

MEG. Beth, you're not helping.

JO. And then suddenly they tell you—not that you're grown, but that you're a lady and you'd best be fragile so that someone will pick you out and claim you for his own, like a doll from a toy shop shelf.

MEG. Well, perhaps. But what else can you do, unless you want to stay here at home all your life.

JO. Make my own living.

MEG. But if you're one of those women who make their own way—

JO. Living, I said—

MEG. You'll work dreadfully hard.

JO. Well, I look forward to it!... I just can't help thinking of a boy's life—of all they get to do. At least I can do just as much as I'm allowed... I wonder what that Laurence boy is doing at the moment.

(JO goes to the window.)

BETH. Preparing for Christmas alone with his grandfather.

JO. That does sound a bit lonely. I guess I wouldn't change places with him tonight. Wish we could meet him.

MEG. Well, you can't. He's rich and we're poor and there's no proper way to meet.

JO. *(Sly:)* No proper way. No...

MEG. Now, Jo!

Scene 2: Marmee's Homecoming

JO. Here's Marmee! Strike up, Beth! Stoke the fire, Meg.

BETH. I'll put her slippers by the fire!

JO. No, leave that to me! She's home! She's home!

(BETH plays. MARMEE enters.)

BETH. Hurrah! She's home!

MEG. Merry Christmas, Marmee!

JO. Three cheers and halleluiah!

MEG. Let me take your cloak.

MARMEE. Glad to find you so merry, my girls!

HANNAH. *(Enters from the kitchen:)* Happy Christmas, Mother March. I'll serve the pudding up.

JO. *(Indicates birthday chair:)* Sit here.

MARMEE. It's not my birthday...

JO. No...

MARMEE. Whatever you say.

BETH. You'll see!

(HANNAH sets the table for Christmas supper. MARMEE takes her shoes off.)

MARMEE. Where are my slippers?

JO. Just you wait.

MARMEE. Where's Amy?

MEG. She's on some mysterious errand.

AMY. *(Enters:)* Here I am.

(MARMEE opens her arms. AMY runs to her.)

Merry Christmas, Marmee.

MARMEE. Merry Christmas!

JO. *(Presents box:)* Now!

MARMEE. Oh! What's all this?

JO. Open this first. You need them.

MARMEE. Slippers! New slippers!

JO. First rate army issue!

MARMEE. Jo, dear, thank you! And from Meg.

MEG. *(Presents box:)* Gloves!

MARMEE. Lovely! Children, how did you manage this? Did you by any chance—

BETH. *(Presents package:)* You know what we did!

MARMEE. You each spent your Christmas dollar on a present for me? What's this? *(Opens handkerchiefs)* From Beth...handkerchiefs!

BETH. I hemmed them myself, but the stitching's crooked.

MARMEE. But done with your own two hands. *(Dries her eyes)* And from Amy.

AMY. (*Presents bottle:*) You see it's the large bottle of cologne, not the small one, though I was terribly tempted by a box of Faber's drawing pencils for my own self. But instead, here! I've given all my money for this present and see? It's the prettiest one of all—

JO. Oh, really?

MARMEE. Now, Amy—

AMY. —and I'm truly trying not to be selfish any more!

HANNAH. (*Offstage:*) Pudding! Pudding!

MARMEE. We're coming, Hannah! Thank you, Amy. You've been so very generous, all of you. Shall we go to supper?

HANNAH. (*Enters with the pudding:*) And here we are!

JO. Hurrah for Hannah!

AMY. Hurrah for the pudding!

HANNAH. And we have applesauce, and hot tea, and cream.

MARMEE. Before we sit down, girls, there's something weighing on my mind that I must tell you. You know the Hummel family—Mrs. Hummel and her five children, just 'round the corner? Well, I stopped in to see them on my way home, only to find all six of them and the newborn baby huddled into one bed to keep from freezing, for they have no fire. There doesn't seem to be any food there, either—

JO. Oh. Well, then, I'm glad you told us before we began eating!

MEG. Yes, we'll give them our supper.

AMY. Our *whole* supper?

HANNAH. Oh, Mother March—on *Christmas Eve*—

MARMEE. I know, Hannah—but they have *nothing*.

BETH. May I go and help carry the supper to them?

MEG. Yes, we *will* go.

AMY. (*Sighs:*) All right. I'll carry...I'll carry the pudding!

JO. Good! And firewood—we'll take the stack of firewood I chopped this afternoon—

BETH. Let me push the wheelbarrow.

JO. Can you manage it, Beth?

MARMEE. I'll help you.

JO. Capital, Marmee! Because, you see, if you and the little girls take supper to the Hummels, that will leave me and Meg to set up for the play.

MARMEE. The play? What play?

JO. We're putting on a Christmas play for you, Marmee!

MARMEE. And what might the play be about?

JO. Don't tell her a word of it.

MEG. And we can have biscuits and more tea after the play.

MARMEE. Might there be a hero in the play? Might there be a villain in red boots?

JO. It's a new play, Marmee.

MEG. Don't tell her the plot, Beth. Promise, Amy?

AMY. I'll not reveal a word.

(LAURIE appears upstage of the house. MARMEE, BETH and AMY exit.)

(Music. JO and MEG begin to assemble the set for "The Witches' Curse: An Operatic Tragedy.")

(LAURIE waves to the supper party, who are out of sight for the moment. JO goes to the window.)

JO. Oh, look! It's the Laurence boy.

MEG. Jo! Come help me here.

(Music. MARMEE, AMY and BETH appear beside LAURIE upstage. The four shake hands, carry on animated conversation, wave good-bye, exit.)

Scene 3: Melodrama

(Lights up on MARMEE and HANNAH, sitting down to be the audience. BETH takes her place at the piano, plays.)

MARMEE. Look—we have box seats.

HANNAH. Beth is playing the overture.

BETH. *(Stops playing:)* Yes, I am!

(JO peeks out from behind the curtain to see what's holding the music up. Gestures to BETH to continue playing.)

BETH. Oops.

(BETH resumes. Curtains open on a gloomy cave in front of which Hugo [JO] stands in a black beard and boots. Within the cave, Hagar [MEG], the Witch, waits for her cue. AMY watches from “back-stage.”)

HUGO (JO). *(Sings in mock-operatic style:)*

There is a lady named Beautiful Zara,
I love her so much I would kill or I'd die.
She loves a fellow who's called Roderigo.
The witches' curse on Roderigo I cry:

(Hugo [JO] pauses for breath and MARMEE, HANNAH, AMY, and BETH applaud.)

Curse Roderigo!

Curse Roderigo!

(Hagar, the Witch [MEG] appears.)

HAGAR (MEG). Who is invoking the witches' curse?

HUGO (JO). I, Hugo. The villain.

HAGAR (MEG). Oh. You. What is it this time?

HUGO (JO). I would like some poison.

HAGAR (MEG). What—poison again? You are always asking for poison.

HUGO (JO). Give me a poison to kill Roderigo. And a potion, a love potion to make Zara love me. Don't make me ask you twice.

HAGAR (MEG). You are unusually polite, Hugo. You must be serious this time.

HUGO (JO). Yes, I am. I have finally found love. Do you dare thwart me?

HAGAR (MEG). Not directly. Not for the moment. Ho, minion!

MINION (BETH). *(Enters with two little bottles:)*

Hither I come from my fairy home

Afar in the silver moon.

Take the magic spell and use it well

Or its powers will vanish soon.

(Minion forgets the rest of her speech, hands bottles to Hugo, runs off.)

HAGAR (MEG). A potion and a poison.

(Hugo puts bottles in his boots, exits.)

I hate wicked Hugo, I spit in his eye.

Huge shall take his own poison and die.

(Enter Roderigo [JO] in red beard, escorting the beautiful Zara [AMY].)

RODERIGO (JO). *(Sings:)* They call me Roderigo!

(“Audience” applauds.)

And may I present the beautiful Zara?

(Applause.)

ZARA (AMY). *(Sings:)* Roderigo! Roderigo!

JO. *(Aside:)* Don't try to sing, Amy. You know you can't sing!

ZARA (AMY). *(Speaks loudly:)* Roderigo, Roderigo, you know I can't sing.

RODERIGO (JO). Yes? And? What else would you like to say?

ZARA (AMY). ...Nothing comes to mind at the moment.

RODERIGO (JO). *(To audience:)* I must leave the rest of the scene to your imagination. Intermission, ladies and gentlemen.

(Intermission. Sound of hammering “backstage” as if the set might be falling apart.)

HANNAH. Isn't Amy pretty?

(Behind the curtain, JO groans. BETH goes to help.)

MARMEE. *(Loud enough for JO to overhear:)* And Jo is so good in both parts, you hardly know she's the same person.

AMY. *(Behind the curtain:)* But I want to sing.

HANNAH. It's just a masterpiece. A masterpiece!

JO. You can't. Just say your lines.

MARMEE. Isn't it, though.

AMY. You get to sing.

BETH. We're starting! Listen to this, now. Amy is going to sing. Amy made Jo let her sing.

(BETH turns back to the piano, plays chord. Curtains open on the tower. AMY reluctantly ascends.)

JO. Carry on, Amy. All the way to the top.

AMY. This doesn't feel very steady, Jo.

JO. We're onstage. Everyone can hear you.

ZARA (AMY). *(Sings:)* Roderigo, my hero!

RODERIGO (JO). *(Sings:)* Zara, beloved!

ZARA (AMY). *(Sings:)* Roderigo, my hero...

RODERIGO (JO). *(Speaks:)* Yes?

HANNAH. Someone's coming to the door.

MARMEE. *(Rising:)* Who could that be?

(JO turns to the audience. Clears her throat. Glares.)

HANNAH. Sssh, Mother. Let me go.

MARMEE. Thank you, Hannah.

JO. What's the matter out there in the audience?

MARMEE. Sorry, Jo. Please proceed.

RODERIGO (JO). *(Turns back to "Zara":)* Well, what are you doing, anyway, locked up in that tower? Is it that your father has locked you up there to keep you away from me because I don't have enough money to marry you? Is that the reason?

ZARA (AMY). Yes! Yes, that's the reason.

JO. Then, shall we run away together?

AMY. *(Considers. Then, sings:)* Roderigo, my hero!

JO. I'll take that for your answer.

(Hugo produces a rope ladder and throws it up to Zara, who catches it, secures it, and starts to descend. HANNAH enters, leading LAURIE, BROOKE, and OLD MR. LAURENCE. Don Pedro [MEG] enters.)

DON PEDRO (MEG). No! *(To Zara:)* Where do you think you are going? *(To Roderigo:)* And you—you blackguard! You penniless rogue! You knave!

AMY. Don Pedro, my father!

(The tower comes crashing down. Roderigo and Don Pedro endeavor to free Zara from the wreckage.)

AMY. I told you so! I told you so!

JO. *(Growls:)* This is a sorry, sorry performance!

MEG. Act as if it were all right.

JO. Wonderful! *You* say what comes next!

DON PEDRO (MEG). *(Clears her throat:)* You, Roderigo, listen! I have lived lo these many years a weary life, a sad life; for hours and years and seasons, a weary, sorry life—

JO. A speech out of nowhere, Meg.

MEG. Stay in character, Jo.

Scene 4: Christmas Party

RODERIGO (JO). *(Turns to audience, notices the newcomers:)* My word! Look who's here. *(Bows)* The end!

MARMEE. Mr. Laurence, our old friend!

OLD MR. LAURENCE. Please forgive the intrusion, Mrs. March. I heard you gave your supper to the poor, Mrs. March, so I wonder if you might permit us to share.

(OLD MR. LAURENCE, LAURIE, and BROOKE produce Christmas supper in baskets.)

MARMEE. Oh, how splendid of you! Children, this is Mr. Laurence, Father's friend, you know, who lives just across the way and Young Mr. Laurence, I believe—

OLD MR. LAURENCE. My grandson! And his tutor, Mr. Brooke.

LAURIE. I do admire your boots, Miss March.

JO. Thank you, Mr. Laurence; but I am not Miss March, I'm only Jo.

LAURIE. I'm not Mr. Laurence, I'm only Laurie.

MEG. Laurie Laurence—what an odd name!

LAURIE. My first name is Theodore, but I don't like it. Too stuffy. And this is Brooke.

BROOKE. *(To MEG:)* And who might you be?

MEG. Margaret.

BROOKE. Margaret.

JO. Just plain Meg. Please call her Meg—and let's be ourselves! *(To LAURIE:)* I did so hope we'd have an excuse to meet you.

BROOKE. So pleased to meet you, Margaret!

MEG. *(Takes his basket:)* Thank you. And this is Amy—

JO. Will we be losing you to college, soon? I see you pegging away at your books.

LAURIE. Not for a year or two. I'm only fifteen.

JO. Why, so am I. And I'm glad you won't be rushing off, now that we've met.

LAURIE. We had to meet—you all seemed so jolly. Couldn't stay away forever.

JO. Wouldn't it be capital to have you for a brother! I'll wager we'd have real adventures. Don't you wish you were at the war?

LAURIE. Of course!

AMY. *(Takes Laurie's basket from JO and unpacks:)* Look, Jo. Smoked chicken! Look! Real, actual mincemeat!

MARMEE. Dear Mr. Laurence! How can I thank you?

OLD MR. LAURENCE. Well, let me see. As it happens, I like music...

MARMEE. Beth? Listen to this.

OLD MR. LAURENCE. I certainly do love music, and sometimes I hear someone in this house play when I sit at my window. Whoever is playing, I do so like to hear her.

MARMEE. She's a bit bashful.

(In answer, BETH plays Christmas carol: "Watchman, Tell Us of the Night.")

OLD MR. LAURENCE. You play beautifully.

BETH. *(Forgetting her shyness for a moment:)* Well enough for hymns and carols—but I'm afraid the old piano won't stay in tune.

OLD MR. LAURENCE. Won't it, now?

JO. *(To LAURIE:)* I hate my name, too—so sentimental! I wish everyone would say Jo instead of Josephine. My Aunt March, for instance: "Josy-phine, Josy-phine!" How do you make people call you Laurie and not Theodore?

(AUNT MARCH enters.)

LAURIE. They call me Theodore, I thrash 'em.

JO. Well, I don't suppose I can thrash Aunt March.

MEG. Merry Christmas!

AUNT MARCH. Good evening, everyone, and, yes, Merry Christmas.

JO. Aunt March, what a surprise!

AUNT MARCH. I heard you had no presents and so I—I—well. I see. *(Views supper)* There is, apparently, no special need. You seem to do quite well on your own. I gather you have no need of help from...relations.

MARMEE. Aunt March, our kind neighbor, Mr. Laurence—

OLD MR. LAURENCE. Of course! We are well acquainted. Charmed, as always, Georgetta.

AUNT MARCH. James.

OLD MR. LAURENCE. Beth was just telling us how she loves to play the piano.

AUNT MARCH. Yes, I know all that.

OLD MR. LAURENCE. No, but she plays with real feeling.

LAURIE. *(Aside to JO:)* You climb trees, don't you?

AMY. Don't ask her that!

JO. Yes!

AMY. Don't *tell* him!

JO. Hush, Amy. If you want a real lady, there she is. *(Gives AMY a shove toward AUNT MARCH. To LAURIE:)* You ride horses, don't you?

LAURIE. You know I do!

AUNT MARCH. *(Turns to JO:)* Josephine, come here to me. Whatever are you wearing? Is this what you call your Christmas best?

OLD MR. LAURENCE. *(Offers his arm:)* Georgetta, you must sing for your supper! Beth?

(BETH plays. All sing.)

Watchman, tell us of the night,
What its signs of promise are.
Traveler, o'er young mountain's height,
See that glory beaming star.
Watchman, doth its beauteous ray,
Either hope or joy confide?
Traveler, yet, it heralds great,
Promised news of Christmastide.

(Lights down.)

Scene 5: Jo's Garret

(LAURIE enters. AMY meets him.)

AMY. Laurie! Oh, do come in. Here, sit next to me and tell me everything.

LAURIE. Well...I delivered fair Meg to the mansion door.

AMY. Yes, and?

LAURIE. That's all.

AMY. Well, how did she look?

LAURIE. *(Looks about for JO:)* Same as she looked when she left here an hour ago.

AMY. No. I mean, really, how was she?

LAURIE. I say, Amy, isn't Jo at home?

AMY. Laurie, please. We're discussing Meg.

LAURIE. Quite right. Sorry. What were we saying?

AMY. Well...how was she? Did she fit in with the other girls?

LAURIE. Yes, I think they found her quite satisfactory.

JO. *(Enters:)* And they hugged her and kissed her and screamed over her dress and gloves—

LAURIE. All that and more.

JO. Good. I'm glad I'm not there.

AMY. Oh, honestly, Jo! You have no respect for anything important.

(AMY exits.)

JO. Why didn't you stay?

LAURIE. I knew you were here so I came back.

JO. You felt sorry for me?

LAURIE. No, I should say not!

JO. Well I *was* invited, but I declined. I don't much like fancy social occasions.

LAURIE. Fine with me. I came back because I felt like a visit with you.

JO. Oh. Very well. *(Starts up the stairs to the garret)* Come along, Teddy.

LAURIE. Teddy?

JO. May I call you that? Theodore is too much, but I like "Teddy" and I think it suits you.

LAURIE. Then call me Teddy.

(They ascend to the garret.)

So this is your special hideaway. May I really come in?

JO. Well, usually no one is allowed in but me. But, yes, you may.

(Sets a large cushion between them, sits, hugging her knees.)

I call it my garret and pretend that I'm a brilliant writer and that I live here, at the top of the house, midst a bustling city.

LAURIE. All alone?

JO. What of it?

LAURIE. Oh...nothing. Going to show me a story?

JO. Oh, I don't think so.

LAURIE. Oh...I'll wager you are a brilliant writer.

JO. Time will tell, but not today.

LAURIE. Well, this is capital—to have the whole attic to yourself.

JO. Yes, and actually I'm not alone. There's Scrabble.

LAURIE. Scrabble? Who or what is Scrabble?

JO. Oh, he's quite intelligent. Excellent listener. A rat—there he is behind your foot.

LAURIE. (*Jumps away:*) Yipes!

JO. Gone again. Good-bye, Scrabble!

LAURIE. I don't believe he exists at all!

JO. Oh, he does and I read him all my stories.

LAURIE. Should I be jealous?

JO. No.

LAURIE. Some people have a muse or an angel. Leave it to Jo March to have a rat!

JO. Oh, I do like you! Forgive me for being cranky. I'm writing a book of fairy tales. I've been working on it forever and the last story won't come out right. I'm afraid I've been lazy and restless since Christmas. All of us have, though we try to be good.

LAURIE. Perhaps you try too hard and in the wrong direction. You say you're cranky, lazy, and restless? That won't do. What you need is actual wickedness. I think you should smoke cigars.

JO. Mind your tongue, Teddy. My word, no one talks to me as you do.

LAURIE. Good!

JO. No one dares.

LAURIE. I think I'm about to be sent home.

JO. Yes, you are because I want to write.

LAURIE. All right, but first I want to show you something. Come to the window.

(LAURIE leads her down to the window on the landing.)

What do you see?

JO. A birdhouse?

LAURIE. It was a purple martin house, but I cleaned it out for a post office. There's a cubbyhole for each of us—for Meg, Amy, Beth, and for me and for you—so if I can't see you constantly, at least we can exchange letters.

JO. Splendid! It's positively literary. Get out of here, so I can write you a letter.

(LAURIE exits.)

Scene 6: Vanity Fair

(MARMEE enters, sits in her rocker, takes up her needlepoint. AMY enters.)

AMY. When is Meg coming home?

MARMEE. You asked me that a half hour ago, darling. Do you remember what I said?

AMY. She's not coming home 'til tomorrow.

MARMEE. That's right.

AMY. It seems like forever.

MARMEE. It's only a weekend.

(Lights up on JO in the attic, writing in her fairy-tale book.)

JO. And the good fairy said, I won't leave you money or pretty dresses, but I will leave you the spirit to seek your own fortune from your own efforts. The End. Signed, Josephine March.

(Blows on page to dry the ink. Closes book.)

Well, that's done! All done, Scrabble! The whole book! Scrabble? Scrabble? Show yourself. All right, don't show yourself. But watch

this, Scrabble— (*Opens tin and places book inside*) This little book is all done and nice, nobody's going to chew it, I don't need any tooth marks on the binding. (*Descends to the parlor:*) Listen, everyone! I finished my book of fairy tales.

MARMEE. Why, congratulations, Jo.

(*MEG and LAURIE enter. MEG pauses outside the door.*)

MEG. Forget it, Laurie. I was just playing make believe.

LAURIE. Make believe.

MEG. Yes, that's all it was. You're free to go home.

(*MEG goes in. LAURIE follows.*)

AMY. Oh, look. Here's Meg! But you weren't to come home tonight. You're supposed to be at your party!

LAURIE. Her ladyship! Delivered to you from the jaws of worldly vice—

AMY. Oh, Meg! I've missed you awfully!

MEG. I was only gone for a day and a night, Amy.

MARMEE. Home early, Meg?

MEG. Yes. I've had a beastly time.

LAURIE. Oh, now, Meg. I can't believe that was a beastly time you were having. Why, you should have seen her there at the party.

MEG. (*Laughs:*) Laurie...

LAURIE. She bats her eyes, she curtseys, she fans her low-cut gown.

JO. Meg doesn't own a low-cut gown.

LAURIE. And what was that sparkly stuff in the glass, Meg? Ginger ale, my dear fellow, nothing but ginger ale. Then, may I have a sip? Oh, no, better not.

JO. Hush up, Laurie. You're giving us a worry.

LAURIE. Oh, no. I assure you I'm all admiration.

MARMEE. Well, how *was* the party, Meg?

MEG. Actually, it was very nice. You might even say perfect.

LAURIE. Every luxury: a twelve-piece orchestra, crystal, caviar.

MEG. It was beautiful. The food was divine.

LAURIE. And the dancing! Do you realize that Meg knows how to do *all the dances*? Even the wild ones.

MEG. I danced when I was asked. Why, you asked me yourself! And you hardly need a teacher—you dance expertly, so why shouldn't I?

JO. Hear, hear!

MEG. (*Irritated:*) What would you like to have seen, Laurie? Did you want me to stand in a dowdy frock with my back to the corner, peeking out at the festivities. That's it—Meg the Freak from the poor, eccentric, bookish family.

JO. Oh!

MEG. I'm sorry. I didn't mean that. In fact, I'm terribly glad too to be home.

LAURIE. No, I'm the one who's sorry. Forgive me for teasing, Meg. You did look lovely, even if you weren't quite yourself. I think I'll push off. Grandfather expects me for tea...or something!

MEG. It's all right, Laurie, really. Thank you for fetching me home.

LAURIE. Good-bye, then.

MEG. Good-bye, Laurie.

LAURIE. (*Salutes.*) Jo, check the post office tomorrow. There'll be something for you. (*Exits.*)

JO. Are you ashamed of us, Meg!

MEG. I didn't mean any of that. Marmee, I want to 'fess up. It's all true, what Laurie told you. I romped, I flirted, I drank champagne—

JO. You flirted? But we discussed flirting. We said no flirting!

MEG. I let them dress me up in borrowed frippery—

AMY. You wore a low-cut gown?

MEG. Yes, I did.

AMY. Really!

JO. Amy, please!

MEG. But then, standing at the punch bowl in my borrowed gown, I started to feel peculiar. I couldn't remember quite who I was. And when the gossip began, I wished with all my heart I was home. I'm sorry for the gossip, Mother, but I didn't invent it. I think I best tell what they said and get it off my mind... They all think that you have what they call "plans" for us and Laurie because he has money—that you want us to know Laurie so he'll marry us—I mean, one of us—

BETH. How peculiar.

JO. It's not peculiar, it's ridiculous. You don't have any "plans" for us, Marmee. So that's what they say in "society"? Wait 'til I tell Laurie. Won't he shout.

MEG. I'd rather you didn't tell Laurie, Jo. Really, have you no pride?

JO. I'd imagine I do.

MARMEE. Of course she won't tell.

JO. We'll just marry him, won't we, and march on to our cooking and sewing and adventure will be finished and liberty will be at an end.

MARMEE. Who on earth are you quoting?

JO. Jo March.

MARMEE. I see. Listen, Meg, shall I tell you who you are?

MEG. Please do.

MARMEE. You are a fine young girl, and the daughter of a family not rich enough nor inclined to follow fashion. But you'll be your

own woman, soon, and of course you need to satisfy your curiosity about the world.

JO. Does she have to do it in a low-cut gown? Christopher Columbus!

MARMEE. Well, perhaps not, but though I can't approve of low-cut gowns, I don't see any serious harm done. And as it happens, Jo, I do have plans for my girls. Would you all like to hear them?

AMY. Yes!

MEG. Please tell.

MARMEE. I want my daughters to be...let me see...accomplished, good...to have a happy youth, to be well and wisely married—

JO. Or to be splendid old maids!

MARMEE. That's right, Jo. And either way, to be cherished and admired...to be ready for duty and capable of joy. My dear girls, I am ambitious for you but not to have you make a dash in the world merely by marrying rich men. Beth, shall we see about tea?

JO. (*Detains MEG.:*) Meg? Did you really flirt?

MEG. I tried. I don't know if I succeeded.

JO. You won't get silly on me, will you Meg? You won't turn all stupid and blank, and pine at the window for the young men, and forget who you are and forget me?

MEG. No, Jo.

JO. Promise?

MEG. I think so.

JO. *Promise?*

MEG. I think so.

JO. Say "yes." Say "definitely yes."

(*MEG gazes out the window.*)

Well?

MEG. (*Absentmindedly:*) Oh. Yes!

(*MEG exits. Lights down.*)

Scene 7: Theater Outing

(*Up at the P.O., JO discovers a letter in her box, runs down to the house.*)

JO. Meg! Meg, listen! A special invitation from the P.O.! (*Reads.*) Oh, Teddy, how jolly! Here's my kind of social occasion!

(*MEG, BETH and AMY enter.*)

JO. "Request your immediate reply—" Meg!

AMY. You needn't shout. We're standing right under your mouth.

MEG. Nose, Amy. For heaven's sake, what is it, Jo?

JO. Well, it's only for me and Meg.

AMY. So? I want to hear it.

JO. Suit yourself. Listen Meg, Laurie's inviting us to the theater this very afternoon. To see *The Hall of the Mountain King*. Imagine. (*Reads from letter:*) "I'm on my way to fetch you—won't let you off at any price. I've asked your mother, so nobody shall worry. In a tearing hurry, yours ever, Laurie!"

MEG. Whatever shall we wear?

JO. Wear what you have on—we aren't the show, we're the audience.

MEG. Well, since it is a matinee—

AMY. Are you just going to go off with Laurie and leave Beth and me at home?

BETH. I want to be at home. Old Mr. Laurence sent me over a new piece for the piano.

AMY. You must let me come. Beth will be fussing over the piano, repeating and repeating, and I haven't got anything to do, and am so lonely.

MEG. We can't, dear, because you aren't invited.

JO. You can't go, Amy, so don't be a baby and whine about it. Go next time.

AMY. I'll ask Laurie—I've got my rag money, and will pay for myself. He'll say yes when he knows how much I want it—

MEG. Suppose we take her. I don't believe Mother would mind, if we bundle her up well—

JO. If she goes, I shan't and if I don't go, Laurie won't like it. And it will be very rude, after he invited only us, to go and drag Amy in. I should think she'd hate to poke herself where she isn't wanted.

AMY. *Meg* wants me.

JO. Our seats are reserved and you can't be off sitting someplace alone in the theater, can you? And we can't allow Laurie to give her his seat, Meg, it isn't proper.

AMY. Since when did you care for anything proper!

JO. Laurie's at the door, Meg. Fetch your gloves if you're going to wear them.

MEG. (*Producing two pairs of gloves:*) You must wear your gloves, too, Jo.

JO. (*Examines gloves:*) Oh, no—look. I poured lemonade on mine and both of them are spoiled. This is dastardly, Meg!

MEG. Here, quick! Take my good glove and wear it, and hold the spoiled glove crumpled in your other hand—and I'll do the same. There, that's fashionable, I hope.

JO. It's a complete fraud.

MEG. Perfect, because we're going to the theater!

JO. Right!

LAURIE. (*Offstage:*) What ho, girls?!

JO. Teddy!

(AMY enters, in gloves and cloak, frantically struggles to get her boots on.)

AMY. I shall go, Meg says I may. I'll pay for myself. Laurie hasn't anything to do with it.

JO. Meg!

MEG. Not this time, dear.

AMY. *(Bursts into tears:)* I shall go!

JO. We don't have time for this. We're coming, Teddy!

AMY. You'll be sorry for this, Jo March, see if you aren't.

JO. Fiddlesticks, Amy!

(JO and MEG exit.)

Scene 8: Amy's Revenge

(BETH at the piano works away at her piece, stopping and starting, muttering. AMY goes upstairs to Jo's garret, rummages around 'til she finds the tin box, opens it, takes out the finished book, looks at it, goes down the stairs reading it, joins BETH in the parlor. Stands by the fire, reading.)

BETH. *(Not looking up from the piano:)* Is that you, Amy?

AMY. *(Startled:)* Yes! Why?

BETH. Oh, this horrid piano. Listen. *(Plays)* Does this sound right, Amy?

AMY. It sounds fine to me.

(AMY starts to throw Jo's book into the fire. BETH stops playing. AMY hides the book.)

BETH. No, it doesn't!

AMY. Well, aren't you the cross patch.

BETH. I'm sorry, Amy. *(Turns to her)* You don't look right, yourself.

(MARMEE enters.)

MARMEE. Here's my Beth. Here's my Amy... The house seems a bit lonely this afternoon, girls. Shall we have our tea early?

AMY. I'm not hungry.

BETH. I ought just to continue here. I've almost got it.

MARMEE. Well, in that case, I'll go into the village on errands.

BETH. (*Glances at AMY:.*) On second thought, Marmee, may I come with you?

MARMEE. Of course.

BETH. That is, unless you'd like me to stay, Amy. We could play checkers or bring out the old dolls.

AMY. No, thank you.

MARMEE. Goodbye, Amy.

AMY. Goodbye.

(BETH exits with MARMEE. AMY gets the book out of its hiding place, throws it into the fire.)

(Lights down.)

End of Act I

ACT II

Scene 1: Consequences

(AMY asleep in the garret. The old piano in the parlor is gone and in its place, a lovely new one, festooned with a big ribbon. BETH and MARMEE enter.)

BETH. So bright out!

MARMEE. Yes, nothing like bright sun and fresh air. Amy! We're home!

(BETH sees the new piano. Gasps.)

MARMEE. Beth, what is it?

BETH. Marmee! The piano!

MARMEE. Well, my word.

BETH. Was it brought by fairies? Do you think it's real?

MARMEE. Why don't you go and find out?

BETH. *(Approaches slowly:)* I'm afraid it might vanish.

MARMEE. There's a note here, Bethy. It's to you.

BETH. Will you open it?

MARMEE. *(Opens note and reads)* Well, glory be! It's yours.

BETH. Mine? It's such a lovely thing to look at, I can hardly believe it will play.

MARMEE. Go, ahead, Bethy. Go ahead!

BETH. *(Depresses keys. Plays arpeggio.)* Oh! *(Turns to MARMEE, takes the note)* "For the little musician, from Old Mr. Laurence." He's like a king! But how can I thank him? I can't run over to him. His house is enormous—

MARMEE. Unless I'm very much mistaken, he's hovering near the window, hoping to hear you play.

BETH. I must find a way to thank him.

(MARMEE goes to fetch her cloak. BETH plays. JO, MEG and LAURIE burst in through the door.)

JO. What a treat! Teddy, you're a trump!

LAURIE. It *was* brilliant, wasn't it?

JO. Brilliant!

MEG. The costumes!

JO. I liked the explosion and the fire effect!

MEG. Why, Beth!

JO. Well, my word! Just look!

LAURIE. A-hah! Grandfather! I *knew* he'd been planning this.

(MARMEE enters.)

LAURIE. I must go congratulate him.

MARMEE. Let me come with you.

LAURIE. Good! See you in a bit, Jo? Skating?

JO. Right!

MEG. Thanks ever so much, Laurie!

MEG and JO. Good-bye!

(LAURIE exits. AMY enters.)

BETH. Just listen!

(BETH plays, then stops, overcome.)

MEG. Go on, Beth!

(BETH gathers herself and resumes playing.)

AMY. Hello, Amy. Hello, Amy. Hello, Amy! Won't anyone say "hello, Amy"?

MEG. Of course, dear, but this is so extraordinary.

JO. Hello, Amy.

BETH. I'll play again in a little while. I can't bear to go on just now. I'm still getting used to the idea. Won't you tell us about the theater? We're dying to know!

MEG. Well, it was called *The Hall of the Mountain King*.

AMY. (*Coldly:*) We know what it was called.

JO. You've done something Amy. I can see it in your face.

AMY. You think you can see through me, don't you? You think you know everything. You think you run the world.

JO. You've dumped my drawers out, haven't you?

(*JO exits.*)

MEG. Well, first the prince and princess come on in satin robes.

BETH. Yes?

MEG. And then some little elves, all in green...

(*AMY yawns. JO enters.*)

JO. It's not the drawers. Not my hairbrush. Nothing's wrong with my clothes. You didn't go up to the garret, did you, Amy?

AMY. You don't own the house. (*JO starts upstairs*) Other people live here.

JO. (*As she exits to the garret:*) She wouldn't dare!

(*JO looks over everything in the garret, approaches the tin with dread, opens it, dumps the contents out, rummages through it, straightens up, marches downstairs.*)

BETH. Amy, you didn't mess about in the garret, did you?

AMY. (*To MEG:*) A prince and princess, elves, and what else?

JO. (*Enters:*) Beth, Meg, have either of you taken my little book? My fairy-tale book that I just finished?

(*BETH shakes her head.*)

MEG. No, Jo. (*To BETH and AMY:*) After the prince and princess, the lights come up on a huge mountain—

JO. (*To AMY:*) You've got it, haven't you?

AMY. No, I haven't.

JO. You know where it is, then?

AMY. No, I don't.

JO. *(Takes her by the shoulders:)* That's a lie!

AMY. I don't know where it is. Anymore.

JO. *(Gives her a shake:)* You know something about it!

AMY. I don't know where it is, because it isn't anywhere.

JO. Why not?

AMY. It's there. *(Gestures to the fireplace)*

JO. What? Have you really burnt it?

(AMY nods.)

(Shakes her:) You wicked, wicked little girl! I finished that little book and I can never write it again. And I'll never, never forgive you as long as I live!

(JO boxes AMY's ears. MEG and BETH rush to them and separate them.)

MEG. Amy, how could you!

AMY. *(Uncertain:)* You know how mean she was!

MEG. That's no excuse! She can be sorry for being mean, but you can't bring her book back.

BETH. Oh, Jo. Your lovely book. I'm sure she's sorry.

AMY. Well, all right, I *am* sorry. I was angry and I flung it in, and then it was too late—it just—it burnt up.

(MARMEE enters.)

JO. It doesn't matter if she's sorry!

AMY. Don't talk about me like I'm not in the room. Meg—

MEG. I won't comfort you, Amy.

MARMEE. What's all this?

BETH. Oh, Marmee!

MEG. Marmee, Jo and I went off to the theater just as Laurie invited us, you know. And Amy wanted to go, too. We couldn't let her, but Jo was sharp about it—and so Amy has gone and—

AMY. I threw Jo's book into the fire, and I feel like I murdered something and I know I have, but all I can say is that I'm sorry.

MARMEE. I see. Well, Amy, you can't just cry I'm sorry to save yourself from blame.

AMY. But I am sorry. I'm truly, terribly sorry—

MARMEE. Then you'll have to tell her properly Amy. I think you know what I mean.

AMY. Yes. *(Crosses to JO, stands in front of her)* Please forgive me, Jo. I'm very, very sorry.

JO. I'll never forgive you.

AMY. I see.

MEG. Laurie's coming to the door.

(AMY leaves JO, MARMEE goes to her.)

JO. Don't ask me to forgive her. She doesn't deserve it.

MEG. Laurie's come to take you skating, Jo.

JO. I can't see him. Tell him what happened and that I can't see anyone.

MARMEE. Go with Laurie, dear. Tell him yourself, he'll understand. Get some fresh air. Don't think about it—just go.

JO. All right.

(JO exits.)

AMY. I shall go, too.

MARMEE. Amy, do you really wish to make things worse?

AMY. No, I want her to see me. I am not invisible. I want to ask her again.

MARMEE. Well, give Laurie a moment to cheer her up, first.

AMY. No! I'm going now!

(AMY exits.)

MARMEE. Amy—

Scene 2: Temper

(LAURIE enters with AMY, wrapped in blankets, shivering in his arms. JO follows.)

JO. Mother! Mother! Meg!

MEG. *(Enters:)* Amy? What is it, Laurie?

LAURIE. She'll be fine, I think. Let's get her straight to bed.

JO. She fell through the ice.

MEG. *(Calls:)* Marmee!

(MEG and LAURIE, with AMY in his arms, exit. JO enters from outside, MARMEE enters.)

MARMEE. What's happened?

JO. Amy! She was following us and fell through the ice and Laurie pulled her out and—

(MARMEE exits. JO sits alone on the sofa. LAURIE enters.)

LAURIE. She held on tight—

JO. Is she really all right?

MARMEE. Yes, dear, she is. In fact, she wants out of bed already.

JO. Laurie did it all. I skated far ahead though I knew she was behind us and if she did die, it would be my fault! It's my dreadful temper!

MARMEE. I know, dear, I know.

JO. You don't know. You can't guess how bad it is. I'm afraid I'll do something horrible someday and spoil my life and everyone will shun me.

MARMEE. (*Takes JO in her arms:*) Jo, dear, listen. You think your temper is the worst in the world, but mine used to be just like it.

JO. Yours, Mother? Why, you are never angry.

MARMEE. I've been trying to cure it for forty years and have only nearly succeeded in controlling it. I am angry nearly every day of my life.

JO. You are, aren't you. You really are. When you fold your lips tight together—

MARMEE. Oh, do I?

JO. Yes, you do.

MARMEE. Well, I've had a hard time of it, Jo, and shed bitter tears over my failures.

JO. But you have some secret.

MARMEE. I don't think I do. Well, perhaps one, but it's a mystery.

JO. What?

MARMEE. Just that. It's a mystery—what makes people do as they do: myself, sometimes so bitter, and at other times, able to control my temper. And when I contemplate that, it makes it easier to forgive.

JO. You mean grace.

MARMEE. Yes! And I mean life itself—it's mysterious what makes people do things that annoy, petty things, sometimes terrible things that shouldn't be allowed and I find I must allow them. But often I don't understand.

JO. You understand one thing. That it's better not to explode.

MARMEE. (*Laughs*) Yes! Usually so. I'll tell you what I understand— (*Embraces her*) I understand you, my darling.

JO. You do, don't you.

MARMEE. Did you notice, by chance, the bit of warmth in the breeze this afternoon? It must be almost spring. Here's Amy, now.

(MEG and BETH enter, carrying AMY.)

AMY. Don't carry me, I can stand. I'm sorry Jo, I wanted to tell you—

JO. Shh, Amy. I'm sorry, too.

(MEG and JO settle AMY on the couch and wrap her up. JO sits there with her, holding her hand. BETH returns to the piano.)

Scene 3: Gratitude

(HANNAH enters with OLD MR. LAURENCE.)

HANNAH. Come in, come in, sir. Look who I found on our doorstep?

OLD MR. LAURENCE. Uninvited! A rogue and a beggar!

(BETH rises.)

HANNAH. More like a king, at least to this household!

OLD MR. LAURENCE. How are you, Amy?

AMY. I'm really just fine.

BETH. *(Offers her chair:)* Sit here, Mr. Laurence.

OLD MR. LAURENCE. Sit down, dear girl. I didn't come to frighten you, I came to hear you play—

BETH. *(Clears her throat)* Mr. Laurence—

OLD MR. LAURENCE. No, no, please don't say a word!

BETH. *Dear* Mr. Laurence—

OLD MR. LAURENCE. Sshh. I heard music from my window this afternoon and then I heard nothing, so I became impatient and meddlesome and here I am.

BETH. *(Sits)* What would you like to hear, sir?

OLD MR. LAURENCE. Anything that's not a hymn.

(BETH plays. LAURIE enters, doffs his cap, produces a flower for AMY, then one for JO. AUNT MARCH enters.)

OLD MR. LAURENCE. Very nice. The human spirit does need something more than hymns.

(BETH gets up, runs to him and kisses him.)

BETH. How kind you are!

HANNAH. Is that our Beth?

AMY. *(To JO:)* Did you see that?

JO. Knock me over with a feather!

AUNT MARCH. Well, that was forward. I heard the littlest girl had an accident? Fell through the ice?

MARMEE. She's all right.

AMY. Yes. I'm all right now.

AUNT MARCH. But to fall through the ice—how frightening. Was no one watching you?

AMY. Yes, it was, dreadfully frightening, and the edges of the ice were sharp and jagged, and the water was cold as Antarctica.

AUNT MARCH. Really. Cold as Antarctica!

JO. *(To MARMEE:)* I believe she's recovered.

Scene 4: Telegram

(BROOKE enters.)

BROOKE. Excuse the intrusion—

MEG. Mr. Brooke!

MARMEE. Mr. Brooke! I knew someone was missing. Now we are all together!

BROOKE. Good evening, all. Good evening, Margaret!

AUNT MARCH. *Margaret?*

BROOKE. (*Corrects himself:*) Miss March.

MEG. Good evening, Mr. Brooke.

BROOKE. I do hate to interrupt the revelry, but I'm to deliver this telegram.

MARMEE. Dear God!

JO. Father!?!

MARMEE. (*Opens the telegram, reads.*) Father is very sick at the front. I must go to him at once.

JO. Oh, no!

BETH. Father!

MEG. What shall we do?

JO. Let me see. (*Takes telegram, reads.*) How shall we afford it?

MARMEE. Shh, Jo! Be calm, girls, and let me think.

AUNT MARCH. No savings. No, I thought not. Nothing set aside for a rainy day.

JO. I have to— (*To LAURIE:*) —I have to go and—get something. Don't let Marmee depart until I'm back.

LAURIE. (*Aside:*) What? Where are you going?

JO. (*Aside:*) Don't follow me. I have to go alone. Have you never heard of self-sufficiency?

(*JO exits. LAURIE follows after JO.*)

OLD MR. LAURENCE. But of course, you aren't to worry about money.

AUNT MARCH. If there is any call for money, James, I shall be the one.

OLD MR. LAURENCE. Georgetta, surely at such a time—

AUNT MARCH. At such a time, there is family pride. They are family, you realize, even if the resemblance is not apparent.

AMY. Aunt March, you are most kind.

OLD MR. LAURENCE. At any rate, Mrs. March, I'll accompany you. We'll take my carriage to the station.

BROOKE. Sir, if I may be excused from my duties, let me go instead.

MARMEE. Yes, dear Mr. Laurence, send Mr. Brooke with me, and you stay here. I'll feel so much safer knowing you're just across the way to keep an eye on my girls.

OLD MR. LAURENCE. So be it.

MEG. Thank you, Mr. Brooke.

AUNT MARCH. Well, perhaps I should take the girls home with me. It's a large home, as you know. And contains many valuable and fragile items.

AMY. Aunt March, you are so very kind.

(MR. LAURENCE and BROOKE exit.)

BETH. *(Puts a hand to AMY's forehead:)* Amy?

AMY. *(Aside to BETH, indicating Beth's new piano:)* If you tell them to be kind, they will be kind.

AUNT MARCH. But perhaps, some of the girls. One or two.

AMY. You are really, unbelievably kind.

(BETH slides her hand down to cover AMY's mouth.)

AUNT MARCH. Or if you like, just one, a small, pretty one with lovely manners.

AMY. *(Pulls BETH's hand away:)* Aunt March, you are most kind. But it might cause jealousy and resentment if you took just one, and you can't take all. I fear it's not practical.

AUNT MARCH. ...No, I fear not.

AMY. Your kindness, however, will never be forgotten.

(AMY curtseys. AUNT MARCH bows and exits.)

BETH. Amy, you've outdone yourself.

MARMEE. Girls? Where's Jo?

MEG. She rushed out somewhere.

MARMEE. At a time like this?

MEG. Laurie's with her, he'll fetch her back.

MARMEE. Very well. Help me pack, and then we'll hold family council.

(BETH and AMY enter with a traveling bag packed for MARMEE.)

AMY. Handkerchiefs, and underthings and an extra shawl and soap.

BETH. You won't be here and you are *always* here and we—I will miss you.

MEG. You mustn't give us a thought, Marmee. We'll carry on.

(JO enters, tremulous, her head covered with a shawl, LAURIE in pursuit.)

JO. *(Aside to LAURIE:)* Don't follow me in unless you want to take the blame.

LAURIE. Never mind the blame. I've got to see the reaction. Amy, at least, is sure to faint.

JO. No one's going to care, once they get used to it.

HANNAH. Go on to your dear husband. I'll be mother.

JO. And I shall be— *(Unveils her shorn head)* man of the house!

MARMEE. Oh, dear. Have you done something rash? What's happened to your hair?

JO. Sold it, for twenty-five dollars! *(Hands money to MARMEE)* You'll need medicines and food and blankets and who knows? You'll have expenses.

MARMEE. Oh, my dear Jo! I hope you won't regret this.

(BETH runs to her, rubs her head.)

JO. Regret it? No, never. I was wild to do something for Father.

BETH. You feel like a Labrador puppy.

MEG. What heroism!

AMY. You cut off your hair? You *sold* your *hair*?

JO. To the wigmaker down the street. They cut it. Snip, snip, and it was gone. (*To MARMEE:*) You aren't angry with me?

MARMEE. No, dear.

AMY. I'd sooner let them cut off my *head*.

JO. It didn't *hurt*, Amy. And my head feels very free.

AMY. But your hair was your only beauty.

LAURIE. Oh, I wouldn't say that.

JO. Who's asking anyone? Marmee, we have to get you to the train.

MARMEE. Thank you, dear Jo, for your sacrifice. Girls?

(They gather to her.)

You'll be well? You'll be good to each other?

JO. We'll be gilded angels.

(MARMEE laughs.)

AMY. We will, we will!

(BROOKE arrives. MARMEE exits with him, all follow her off, leaving JO alone. She rubs her head. Approaches the looking glass, wincingly regards herself. Turns quickly from the glass and sits, huddled up, hugging her knees, controlling tears. MEG enters, sees her, approaches quietly, puts an arm around her.)

JO. Oh, Meg. Is it my only beauty?

MEG. ...No.

JO. What else do I have?

MEG. Well, you have...nice hands. Lovely eyes.

JO. They always say that, don't they, when a girl's a little homely. Nice hands, nice eyes.

MEG. Jo! You have fine, strong features. And you have...your mind!

(JO nods through her tears, almost satisfied.)

Scene 5: Secrets

(A spring afternoon, teatime. JO sweeps the dining room floor while MEG reads a letter aloud to her.)

MEG. “And this afternoon, he sat up in bed.” Marmee says Father is sitting up in bed, Jo.

JO. Good.

MEG. He’s definitely better.

JO. Good.

MEG. The danger’s almost past, she says. Stop sweeping that floor and have a cup of tea, Jo. You’ve swept that floor twice today already.

JO. You’re right.

MEG. “—and I miss you all, but thank God, and John Brooke for his constant assistance.” John Brooke...

JO. We’ve been gilded angels for more than a month! I’ve scrubbed, dusted, swept, darned a million socks and I need a change.

MEG. *(Dreamily:)* Don’t you think he’s kind?

JO. Who?

MEG. Mr. Brooke.

JO. Why shouldn’t he be kind?

MEG. He’s done so much for us.

JO. Yes. And?

MEG. That’s all.

JO. The chores really are all done, aren’t they?

MEG. Very much so.

JO. I need a change, I really do. I'm going to the garret to work on my war story.

MEG. I thought you were writing a mystery.

JO. Finished that. At the moment, I prefer soldiers. Battle plans. Armaments. Strategies.

(BETH enters from outdoors.)

Hello, Beth!

MEG. You look tired, Bethy. Where've you been all afternoon?

JO. I'm off to run a war, Beth—if you'd like a visit, I'm in the garret.

(BETH sneezes.)

MEG. Bless you!

BETH. I—Jo—the Hummels' baby has been sick so Hannah and I took them some porridge. And, well—I feel quite—not quite right.

JO. Oh, don't you, dear? Let me look at you. *(Places her hand on BETH's forehead)* I don't believe you have a fever.

MEG. Here's a cup of tea. *(Pours.)* Where's Hannah?

BETH. Hannah...well, Hannah went back with the doctor to his office.

MEG. Oh? Is Hannah sick?

BETH. Oh, no. She'll be straight home from the doctor's.

JO. You do seem a little off, Bethy. Would you like to curl up in my garret bed? I'd love to have you. I can scribble and you can drink tea.

BETH. Yes!

(JO and BETH ascend stairs.)

MEG. I'm going to write Mother. Any messages?

JO. Won't you take a vacation, Meg?

MEG. But it's what I most want to do.

BETH. Don't tell her I'm sick.

JO. We won't. You're just tired.

(JO and BETH exit. LAURIE enters, unnoticed by MEG.)

MEG. *(To herself:)* Then, afterwards, I may write Mr. Brooke.

LAURIE. Do you mean Mr. John Brooke, my tutor? Is he the one you're writing to?

MEG. Laurie!

LAURIE. At your service!

MEG. Don't eavesdrop!

LAURIE. Weren't you talking to me?

MEG. You know I wasn't!

LAURIE. Well, then, pardon me. When you finish your letters, you can leave them on the table. I'll take them to town when I go.

MEG. Why, thank you.

LAURIE. Not at all. Where's Jo?

MEG. In the garret for a change.

LAURIE. What? Is she back at her scribbling? Good!

(LAURIE ascends to the garret. JO enters.)

JO. Sshh! Beth's not feeling well.

LAURIE. Scribbling, are you? Having fun?

JO. I'm on holiday—self-proclaimed. Fun forever and no grubbing—at least 'til tomorrow. By the way, I saw you in town today.

LAURIE. And I saw you. What were you up to?

JO. Secret.

LAURIE. I've got a secret, myself.

JO. You weren't playing billiards, were you?

LAURIE. I can't believe that you'd be so stuffy as to preach against billiards.

JO. Well—I don't like to see you wasting your cleverness on something as empty as billiards.

LAURIE. We aren't discussing billiards, we're discussing secrets. I'll tell you my secret if you'll tell me yours.

JO. Is it a good one?

LAURIE. Oh, isn't it! All about people you know, and such fun.

JO. Tell!

LAURIE. You first.

JO. You won't repeat it to anyone.

LAURIE. Not a word.

JO. And you won't tease me in private?

LAURIE. I never tease.

JO. Yes, you do. You get everything you want out of people.

LAURIE. Thank you! Tell me your secret.

JO. Well...you know the mystery story I just finished? I left it with the editor of the paper.

LAURIE. Oh, Jo, how wonderful!

JO. Hush! It won't come to anything. He didn't say when he'd give his answer.

LAURIE. It *will* come to something, I know it will! We'll see it in print and won't we be proud of our author!

JO. Now, what's *your* secret?

LAURIE. I'm not finished. I have to hurrah! (*Throws cap in air*) Hurrah!

JO. Ssshhh! Now, your secret. Play fair, Teddy, or you'll never get anything out of me again.

LAURIE. I know where Meg's glove is.

JO. In her drawer.

LAURIE. No, it's not. Brooke has it. She dropped it in the carriage the day we went to the theater. The driver brought it to the house and Brooke said he'd return it to Meg, but he never has.

JO. Is the glove plain or lace?

LAURIE. Lace.

JO. It's not Meg's glove, it's mine—and it's spoiled—it's got a big splotch of lemonade—

LAURIE. Meg's, yours—what's the difference. He thinks it's Meg's and he's got it in his pocket, everywhere he goes. Isn't it romantic?

JO. No!

LAURIE. What, don't you like it?

JO. I think it's horrid! *(Calls:)* Meg!

LAURIE. You can't tell—you promised!

JO. I didn't promise.

LAURIE. That was understood. I trusted you.

JO. Well, I'm disgusted. I wish you hadn't told me.

LAURIE. I thought you'd be pleased.

JO. At the thought of someone coming to take Meg away?

LAURIE. You'll feel better when someone comes for you.

(BETH enters in her nightgown.)

JO. I'd like to see anyone try!

BETH. What is it? What's the matter, Jo?

JO. Sshh. Laurie, keep your secrets to yourself! How do you feel, Bethy?

LAURIE. Are you sick, Beth?

BETH. *(Gets up. Sits down again.)* No.

JO. (*Feels BETH's forehead:*) Maybe you do have a bit of a fever.

(*HANNAH enters.*)

MEG. Hannah?

HANNAH. Have you put Beth to bed? Here's the medicine the doctor gave me.

MEG. She's upstairs with Jo in the garret. Who's the medicine for, Hannah? Are you ill?

HANNAH. Why, it's for Beth. Hasn't she told you? She's been exposed to scarlet fever.

MEG. Oh, no! Oh, my heavens!

(*AMY enters from school.*)

HANNAH. You've had it, haven't you Meg?

MEG. Yes, a mild case, and so has Jo. But not Amy—oh, here's Amy. Amy, you won't like this—but we have to get you out of the house—

(*JO and LAURIE descend from the garret with BETH.*)

Jo, keep Beth there a moment. We just want to get Amy out of the house.

AMY. Why?

HANNAH. (*To BETH:*) I've got your medicine, dear.

JO. What is it, everyone?

HANNAH. Haven't you told anyone, Beth?

BETH. No! I'm sorry! I didn't even think of exposing others! Jo, you've had it—Laurie, have you had scarlet fever?

LAURIE. Yes, I have.

JO. Oh, no—is that it, Bethy? Scarlet fever?

MEG. Aunt March will take Amy.

AMY. Oh, no! Please don't send me away.

BETH. Oh, Amy, I'm sorry. She is pernickety. But you manage her very well.

AMY. ...Yes. I understand her.

MEG. You must go right now, Amy.

LAURIE. I'll take Amy over in grandfather's carriage. (*Exits with MEG and AMY.*) Now, don't you worry, Amy. I'll come and take you for a ride each afternoon, and we can all send letters through our post office—

AMY. Good-bye, Beth!

BETH. Good-bye, Amy.

JO. Scarlet fever, Beth?

BETH. This afternoon—oh, I can't tell it.

HANNAH. The Hummel baby was so sick and so I went to fetch the doctor—and while I was gone, the baby died.

BETH. The baby died in my lap, Jo, but I won't get the fever, I can't get the fever, not with Mother away.

HANNAH. We won't need to worry your mother. I've nursed others through the fever, Bethy, and we'll nurse you.

(*JO wraps BETH in the quilt.*)

BETH. The baby was restless, Jo, and I was talking to her—

JO. Were you?

BETH. And then she was quiet. I didn't want her to be quiet. I'll take the medicine, Jo. I *won't* have the fever.

JO. Come, let's get you to bed, Beth. You'll have whatever you have.

Scene 6: Laurie Makes Mischief

(Lights up in the parlor. BETH, wrapped in the quilt on the couch, asleep. MEG at the dining room table, darning. JO at BETH's bedside with a book, sets the book aside, lays her hand on BETH'S forehead.)

BETH. Hello, Jo.

JO. Oh, I didn't mean to wake you. Feeling any better? She's awake, Meg.

(LAURIE appears at the post office. MEG comes into the parlor.)

MEG. *(To JO:)* Any better?

(JO shakes her head.)

JO. *(To BETH:)* Would you like me to read to you?

BETH. I wish I could see Amy.

MEG. So do I, but if she comes to the house, it'll be too tempting and she'll have to come in. So we'll have to be content with letters.

(LAURIE enters with mail.)

LAURIE. Letters! One for you and one for you and one for me and— *(To MEG:)* —three for you.

MEG. Thank you.

(MEG goes to the dining room with her letters.)

LAURIE. We're in for a laugh. The jig is almost up.

JO. We could use a laugh. What are you plotting?

LAURIE. You'll soon see. Any minute now. But in the meantime, here's something from Amy to all of us. Beth, you've impressed Amy with your fever, even if you haven't impressed me—

JO. Teddy!

LAURIE. I mean it, Beth. I'm not impressed. I want you to give me a different show. Show me Prometheus stealing fire from heaven. Show me Grendel with his arm torn off, dragging Beowulf down to the watery depths.

(BETH laughs.)

That's better. A comedy, now. Show me Cleopatra, driving a herd of elephants.

JO. *Teddy*, show us what you brought.

LAURIE. Well. What I have here is Amy's last will and testament.

(BETH laughs.)

This is serious! She sees that life is tragic and in earnest. She knows sometimes the good die young. Put on a serious face, you clown!

(BETH suppresses giggles.)

"Amy March: My Last Will and Testament. I, being of sound and sanitary mind.

BETH. Sanitary!

LAURIE. Oh, *yes*. "—do wish to dispose of all my earthly property, should I meet an early and untimely end, as follows: viz. to wit: namely..." And there's an enormous list. Whoever would guess little Amy had so much property. You get her inkstand, Jo, but not the lid because you, yourself lost it. Beth, you get her doll collection, even though she acknowledges some are broken.

BETH. Some? Most of them are broken.

JO. —and some are not quite sanitary.

LAURIE. "Furthermore, if I should die untimely, I wish to be remembered as a great artist, even if I have yet to produce a masterpiece. Remember what was in me."

JO. There. She has me shedding a tear—as though we won't have her to plague us for many years to come.

LAURIE. Wait, there's more. "I, Amy March, affix my hand to this, my last will and testament. I hope all will be satisfied and not blame the dead."

JO. That's wonderful! Don't tell her we laughed, *Teddy*. Tell her we won't blame the dead.

BETH. Do you hear the music?

(Solo piano, from far off.)

LAURIE. Yes! Grandfather's playing by the open window for you, Beth. Shall I tell him you like it?

BETH. Oh, yes.

LAURIE. And when are you going to play for him again?

JO. Not today...

MEG. *(Shrieks:)* Jo!

LAURIE. A-hah.

JO. Laurie?

MEG. It's all a mistake! Oh, no! Oh, I'll die of shame. He never sent me any letter. Jo, come here to me this minute!

LAURIE. Better go answer her.

(JO goes to MEG.)

The jig's up—we're in for a laugh now.

BETH. What did you do?

LAURIE. *(Strokes BETH's hair:)* Sssh.

JO. What's wrong, Meg?

MEG. Jo, how could you?

JO. What do you mean? I've done nothing.

MEG. *(Crumples letter and throws it at JO:)* You wrote this and Laurie helped you. How could you be so rude and mean!

JO. From Mr. Brooke? *(Reads:)* "My dearest Margaret, I can no longer restrain my passion and must know my fate before I return. Your parents would consent if they knew we adored one another."

LAURIE. Now I'll catch it! Wait and see, Beth.

JO. *Adored* one another? How dare he speak this way!

MEG. He never did, as you well know. But it gets worse. I answered him.

JO. What did you say? You didn't promise anything.

MEG. I said I was too young! What else would you expect me to say! But he didn't know what I was talking about because he never wrote me at all! Look: "Dear Margaret, I never sent you any love letter at all. Someone is playing pranks on you—your sister Jo, perhaps—"

JO. *(Takes the note from MEG:)* Let me see the handwriting. Look, it matches.

MEG. So?

JO. Well, don't you recognize it?

LAURIE. *(Aside to BETH:)* It's mine. I did it!

(JO marches into the parlor. MEG follows.)

Sssh. *(Indicates BETH:)* Don't worry, Meg, it's not as bad as you think—it's only a prank.

JO. Theodore Laurence—

MEG. I'd just like you both to tell me how I'll ever look Mr. Brooke in the face again.

LAURIE. Meg, I wrote both letters myself. And I intercepted your answer. Jo didn't hear a whisper. And Brooke doesn't know a thing about it.

MEG. Yes, but now you'll go and tell him and have the best laugh yet.

LAURIE. I'll never tell him to my dying day. Wild horses shan't drag it out of me. I never intended that Brooke should hear of it at all.

JO. You could be arrested for tampering with the mail. But I know how to make it worse. Theodore Laurence, I am going to march you over to your grandfather and we'll see what he has to say when he hears that you've been meddling with young girls' hearts!

LAURIE. Why, you're serious, aren't you?

JO. Aren't I! You shall not be allowed to deceive, to make fools of us—

LAURIE. I thought the whole thing would be funny, Beth. I sort of felt like cupid.

JO. To insult, to turn us against each other, to encroach upon our honor?

LAURIE. Insult you? Encroach upon your *honor*?

JO. Indeed. To trifle with our affections.

LAURIE. (*Seriously:*) I would never trifle with your affections.

JO. Cupid!

LAURIE. I didn't make the entire thing up. There is the glove.

MEG. What glove?

JO. *My* glove! I'm warning you, Laurie—don't say another word.

LAURIE. No, best not. I believe I'll just slink home.

(*LAURIE exits. JO and MEG go in to BETH.*)

JO. I am sorry, Meg, though I had nothing to do with it.

MEG. Serves me right for being easy to fool. I thought those letters were real.

JO. You did?

MEG. Oh, it was a pleasant diversion. Like reading a story.

JO. Pleasant?!

MEG. Yes, compared to sickness and being lonesome for Mother. (*Feels BETH'S forehead*) Did the doctor see Beth today?

JO. Yes, yes, and he'll come again tomorrow morning. He didn't say much. I thought he'd be pleased that Beth is so peaceful.

MEG. I wish Marmee were with us.

JO. So do I, but we can't worry her while she's nursing Father.

(*Music: Piano duet.*)

MEG. Listen, Jo. Laurie's joined his grandfather playing. He's trying to beg your pardon.

JO. Of course I forgive him. I always do.

MEG. How lovely. Do you think Beth can hear it while she sleeps?

JO. I hope she can.

Scene 7: Valley of Shadow

(Late night. MARMEE and MEG in their nightgowns at BETH's bedside. MARMEE sits in a rocking chair. MEG tends BETH.)

(Music: Piano duet from far off.)

MEG. Marmee, I'm so glad you're home.

MARMEE. I came the instant I got your telegram. Do you think she's any better, Meg.

MEG. I can't say... Listen to them play. They've been playing all night.

MARMEE. You'd think they'd be tired. She seems a bit more peaceful.

MEG. Oh, Marmee—I was so glad when I knew you were coming. I missed you so, I felt sure she'd improve if you simply stepped in the door.

MARMEE. I hoped so, too, Meg. I'd like to think my love was that powerful. I wish your father were with us. He wanted so much to come home with me.

MEG. When will he be well enough to travel?

MARMEE. Not for some time yet.

(JO enters with fresh bowl of water and towel.)

JO. Let me, Meg. You rest awhile... I'd do anything, *anything* to make her well.

MARMEE. So would we all, Jo. But it's out of our hands.

JO. Yes.

(Music.)

MEG. Marmee? She's asleep. May I close my eyes a minute, Jo?

JO. Please do. I'm quite awake.

(Music.)

BETH. Jo?

JO. Yes, Beth! It's me!

BETH. Hello, Jo.

JO. Oh, Beth, do you recognize me? Are you with us again?

BETH. Jo, I—I—

JO. Beth, please stay with us. I'll love you ever so much more than before. Don't go! I'd miss you too terribly.

BETH. Oh, Jo. And I'll miss...

JO. Yes? What will you miss?

BETH. I'm going to miss, oh, the piano, and sun on the trees.

JO. You must think of what you will miss. You must fight.

BETH. I'm going to miss you, Jo.

JO. Don't—don't say that. Listen, Beth. I'm going to take your place, do everything that you do, and you won't have to do anything. Yes, I'll be the stay-at-home daughter and care for Father and Mother always and keep house for them in their old age—and then it will be you and me. Think how nice that will be—*please*.

BETH. Sshh, Jo. Don't wake the others.

JO. What about our journey? I promised to take you to lands far away. I meant it.

BETH. I know you did. It's just that I'm so very tired.

JO. There must be a place where you can get better. Somewhere with more sun where we can be together.

BETH. There is a place, Jo. But I think I have to go alone.

JO. No, Beth. Don't say that. I'll—I'll even put aside my wildness and my silly writing. I promise, Beth, I promise—only don't go tonight, Beth—oh, Beth, stay. Oh, Beth. Stay.

BETH. I can't—

JO. But Beth, listen to the music.

BETH. Someone is calling me—

JO. Laurie and his grandfather are playing for you. Do you hear?

(No answer. BETH dies.)

JO. Good-bye, Beth, Good-bye.

(Kisses BETH. Stands up, goes to wake MARMEE and MEG.)

Mother? Meg? She's gone.

(Lights down.)

Scene 8: Aunt March Settles the Question

(Winter. The house is in mourning. JO sits at the piano, trying to summon her patience to play. AMY enters, sets a vase of flowers on the piano, sits down, plays with ease. HANNAH rushes in with pipe and pipestand sets them on the mantle.)

AMY. I've been practicing Beth's Christmas carol. I can't play very well, but Laurie's helping me.

(AMY picks out melody: "Pat a Pan.")

HANNAH. Amy, which is it that Father likes to eat: sweet potatoes or white potatoes?

AMY. Sweet potatoes.

HANNAH. *(Heads for the kitchen:)* Of course!

AMY. He won't arrive home today, Hannah. His letter said he'd arrive at Christmas.

HANNAH. Well, that's a mere two weeks away. I've cleaned his study, dusted all his books. And look at this.

AMY. *(Takes pipe and sniffs it)* Father's pipe!

HANNAH. Yes, all nice and clean.

AMY. It smells like his tobacco.

HANNAH. Isn't that a nice smell. Let's see, what else to do?

(HANNAH exits. AMY goes to the piano. BROOKE enters.)

AMY. Mr. Brooke!

BROOKE. Forgive me for barging in—

AMY. You're home, Mr. Brooke! Is Father with you?

BROOKE. No, he sent me on ahead. I bring his love and my love, and extreme sorrow over Beth.

AMY. Yes. Thank you. *(Offers her hand:)* How can we thank you for all you've done?

BROOKE. *(Shakes her hand absently:)* Is—perhaps—anyone else at home?

AMY. Yes. Jo's home. Shall I call her?

BROOKE. Ah, no, no—just tell them all I'm home and say I'll call again this afternoon.

(BROOKE exits.)

AMY. Your umbrella— *(Sets the umbrella aside.)*

JO. *(Enters with MEG:)* Who was that?

AMY. Mr. Brooke.

JO. And Father?

AMY. Not yet. Father sent Mr. Brooke home ahead of him.

MEG. Did he ask for me?

AMY. No.

MEG. Did he say anything else?

AMY. Well, he said he brings his love—

MEG. Oh.

JO. And you said good-bye and he went home.

AMY. Yes, but he forgot his umbrella.

JO. Drat. Where is it? I'll take it to him.

(AMY hands JO the umbrella, MEG takes it from her.)

MEG. Just because Laurie made up wild stories, you needn't dislike John...

JO. Since when do we call him John?

MEG. Mother calls him John.

JO. Yes, but she's Mother. If you call him John, he'll go romantical and start to carry on.

MEG. Oh, nonsense.

JO. Well, if he did carry on, what would you say to stop him?

MEG. I would simply say that I'm too young, that he is very kind but we must simply be friends, as before.

JO. Good! That's stiff and cool enough—

MEG. And then I would walk with great dignity from the room.

(BROOKE enters.)

Mr. Brooke. Hello, Mr. Brooke!

BROOKE. Excuse me, forgive me—I seem to have left my umbrella—

(JO presents his umbrella, stands in front of him, blocking his way to MEG. BROOKE evades her.)

BROOKE. Hello, Margaret.

JO. Come, Amy—something's burning on the stove. *(Aside to MEG:)* Remember what you plan to say.

(JO exits with AMY.)

BROOKE. What do you plan to say?

MEG. (*Backing away:*) Mother will like to see you. I'll call her.

BROOKE. I don't believe your mother is at home.

MEG. Oh?

BROOKE. I saw her in the village.

MEG. Oh.

BROOKE. Are you afraid of me, Margaret?

MEG. (*Stops herself:*) No, of course not. Welcome home, Mr. Brooke. How can I be afraid of you when you've been so kind to Father?

BROOKE. Margaret, while I was away, your mother often read your letters aloud to me.

MEG. Yes, she told me.

BROOKE. Wonderful letters—so full of home! I took the notion that while you were writing, you sometimes thought of me.

MEG. I'm sure I did. We're all so grateful to you, Mr. Brooke. I can't imagine how to thank you.

BROOKE. (*Takes her hand:*) Shall I tell you how?

MEG. Oh, no—please don't!

BROOKE. I won't trouble you. I only want to know if you care for me a little, Meg.

MEG. I don't know...

BROOKE. I can wait. And you can choose to discover if you do.

MEG. But I don't choose! I'm all flustered. Please go away and let me be!

(AUNT MARCH *enters.*)

AUNT MARCH. What's all this?

MEG. Hello, Aunt March!

(BROOKE *flees to the dining room.*)

AUNT MARCH. I came to call on your father.

MEG. Father's not yet arrived home. I'm *so* surprised to see you.

AUNT MARCH. That's evident. And who was that?

MEG. It's Father's friend.

AUNT MARCH. And what is "Father's friend" saying to make you blush like a peony?

MEG. Mr. Brooke came to get his umbrella.

AUNT MARCH. Brooke? That boy's tutor? Making a proposal? You haven't gone and accepted him, child?

MEG. Hush! He'll hear you.

AUNT MARCH. Do you mean to marry this—this—Mr. Grook? If you do, not one penny of my money goes to you.

MEG. I shall marry whom I please, Aunt March, and you can leave your money to anyone you like.

AUNT MARCH. Highty tighty! You'll be sorry, when you've tried love in a cottage and found it a failure. This—Frook is poor and has no rich relations, has he?

MEG. No, but he has many warm friends—

AUNT MARCH. He knows *you* have got rich relations. I suspect that's the secret of his liking.

MEG. Aunt March, how dare you? John is above such meanness. My John wouldn't marry for money any more than I would. We are willing to work and we mean to wait. I'm not afraid of being poor—we are used to being poor and do not mind it. I shall be with him and he loves me—

AUNT MARCH. Well, I wash my hands of the whole affair! Don't expect anything from me when you are married—I'm done with you—with all of you forever!

(AUNT MARCH *exits*. BROOKE *enters*.)

MEG. Oh!

BROOKE. Thank you for defending me. You *do* care for me a little bit.

MEG. I didn't know how much, 'til she insulted you.

BROOKE. (*Embraces her.*) So you won't send me away, but let me stay and be happy? May I?

MEG. Yes, John.

BROOKE. And shall we tell them all at Christmas?

(*JO enters.*)

I don't think the secret will keep! Congratulate us, Sister Jo.

JO. Oh, no! Amy! Somebody do something! (*Falls on the floor*) John Brooke is acting dreadfully and Meg likes it!

(*Blackout.*)

Scene 9: Heartache

(*Just before Christmas. Lights up in the garret, where JO reads on the couch and eats apples. LAURIE ascends the stairs, throws himself down beside her and bites into an apple.*)

LAURIE. It's going to be a romantic Christmas.

JO. Harumph.

LAURIE. Quite seriously, Jo, you must be used to it by now. You're just grumbling out of habit.

JO. Am I?

LAURIE. Put your book down.

(*She complies.*)

Yes, you are. We aren't little children any more.

JO. Laurie, I don't like the look on your face. We're only sixteen.

LAURIE. And Meg is seventeen.

JO. Which is very much too young for—for anything.

LAURIE. There's something I must say. Must ask you.

JO. I have a suspicion what you're going to say. Laurie, please don't!

LAURIE. I must. We've got to have it out and the sooner the better, for both of us.

JO. Well, I don't plan to listen.

LAURIE. You must listen. Think of all we've meant to each other, you and I. Why, we do everything together. Jo, I've loved you ever since I met you.

JO. Well, I love you, too, of course, Teddy, but not love with a capital L. That's not—

LAURIE. Oh, but I mean love with a capital L. I've tried to show it, but you wouldn't let me—

JO. I never meant to entangle you—

LAURIE. I want to be entangled.

JO. But you know my views on—on—

LAURIE. Marriage. I've heard it rumored that you're against it.

JO. Well, best of luck, then!

LAURIE. I know what you say. But girls are so strange you never know really what they'll do. I can't go on like this without a straight answer. So I must ask, will you, Jo?

JO. Don't say it—

LAURIE. Marry me, Jo.

JO. I can't say "Yes" truly, so I won't say it at all. I'm happy as I am and love my liberty too well and not only that—

LAURIE. What? Say it all!

JO. I have to stay home with Father and Mother. I can't go off on my own and leave them. I promised Beth.

LAURIE. Why, Jo, why? You aren't made for that!

JO. I promised, Laurie. And it isn't only the promise I made to Beth. *I'll* never marry.

LAURIE. You say that now, but there'll come a time when you will care for somebody and you'll love him tremendously and live and die for him. I know you will, it's your way, and I shall have to stand by and see it.

JO. Oh, I doubt that very much. I've done my best, but you won't be reasonable, and it's selfish of you to keep teasing for what I can't give. I'll never marry you and the sooner you believe it, the better for both of us—so now we've had it out!

(LAURIE storms down the stairs. JO repairs to the garret.)

Scene 10: Homecoming

(FATHER and MOTHER enter, LAURIE exits the house and meets them outside.)

FATHER. Where are you going, young man?

LAURIE. To the devil!

FATHER. Just a moment, here!

MARMEE. What's the matter, Laurie?

LAURIE. Jo! *(Turns to FATHER:)* Sir?

(MARMEE goes in.)

FATHER. Just let me shake your hand. I've been wanting to meet you, Laurie.

LAURIE. Mr. March!

(They shake.)

MARMEE. Girls! There's someone here to see you. Meg? Amy? Jo?

(MEG and AMY enter.)

FATHER. I hear you're quite a fellow.

AMY. Yes, Mother?

MEG. What is it?

(MARMEE gestures them to go outside.)

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!

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